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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 001206

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM KPKO CG ELECTIONS

SUBJECT: DRC ELECTIONS: SECURITY CONCERNS IN THE KASAIS

REF: KINSHASA 1185

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Western and Eastern Kasai provinces have long been political flashpoints in the DRC due largely to the influence of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS). Rallies and demonstrations in both provinces have in the past often devolved into violent clashes between political protesters and security forces. The menace posed by the UDPS on and around elections, however, is diminished from years past. While some UDPS supporters will most certainly take to the streets to protest elections and intimidate voters, other issues pose larger problems for the region's overall security. The presence of lightly guarded weapons stockpiles, tensions arising from political hate speech, and the training and conduct of police forces are significant security concerns in both provinces that will need to be watched carefully in the elections period. End summary.

UDPS: A DIMINISHING THREAT

¶2. (C) UDPS supporters have in the past held massive demonstrations in Mbuji Mayi and Kananga that shut down economic activity and created significant civil unrest. Frequently, such rallies turned violent, with UDPS militants throwing rocks, overturning cars, breaking windows, and burning tires -- actions for which the party's Kinshasa-based hierarchy conveniently eschews responsibility. Protesters often clash with police or other security forces, resulting in many injuries and deaths. The UDPS has a history as well of bribing "shegues" (street children and youths) to commit acts of violence, harassment or intimidation against the local population -- with the goal of being able to claim the UDPS itself was not responsible for resulting disorder. These actions create an overall sense of fear in the Kasais, as many citizens become scared to leave their homes. Consequently, as was seen during the country's December constitutional referendum, voter turnout was extremely low.

¶3. (C) Some UDPS militants will be visible on election day trying to prevent voters from heading to the polls. MONUC-Mbuji Mayi Head of Office Mamady Kouyate said he worried the UDPS would actively try to intimidate potential voters, which could lower voter participation and thus cast doubt on the legitimacy of the elections (at least in the minds of Kasaians). Kouyate added, though, that he believed such tactics would be mostly ineffective and voters would head to the polls in larger numbers than in December's constitutional referendum. Already some UDPS sympathizers have been intimidating and harassing candidates; during a recent visit to Mbuji Mayi, the motorcade of President Joseph

Kabila was stoned by UDPS supporters. UDPS officials in both provinces predicted to PolOff during a recent visit that there would most certainly be violence on July 30 and afterwards because "the majority" of Kasaians believe the elections are rigged. Members of civil society in Kananga and Mbuji Mayi share this perception, saying there are not enough security precautions in place to prevent the UDPS from upsetting elections.

¶4. (C) Other isolated incidents and acts of intimidation or harassment have been occurring since official electoral campaigning began at the end of June. Officials in Mbuji Mayi have reported that several candidates have had their cars stoned or damaged, and campaign materials in both provinces have been torn down. On the evening of July 26 in Mbuji Mayi, National Assembly candidate Albert Mukuba was the target of an apparent assassination attempt. According to sources in Mbuji Mayi, Mukuba escaped from the unknown assailants with serious injuries, while his mother was killed. Investigations are currently underway into the incident. It is unknown, however, what the motivations may have been regarding the targeting of Mukuba; it appears, though, to be an isolated attack and not part of a wider campaign to eliminate political candidates.

¶5. (C) In general, however, the threat from the UDPS is diminishing in the Kasais. As reported reftel, the UDPS no longer enjoys the degree of support it once did in the Kasais. The population has grown increasingly tired of the party's rhetoric and lack of results stemming from its continual boycott of the electoral process. MONUC officials in Western and Eastern Kasai said the UDPS is mostly just a "nuisance," and officers with the Armed Forces of the DRC

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(FARDC) claimed that they had no worries about the potential for violence coming from UDPS supporters. The governor of Western Kasai Tshiongo Tshibikubula said the population is "far less afraid" of the UDPS than it was a year ago, and there is less support for the party's cause. As Kouyate said, whether the UDPS in the provinces attempts to incite violence or not will largely depend on what course the party leadership in Kinshasa decides to take with regard to the elections.

MANIPULATING EX-COMBATANTS?

¶6. (C) Aside from concerns about the UDPS, though, there are several other pockets of potential instability in the Kasais which have nothing to do with the opposition party. MONUC officials in Kananga said one of their major elections-related security concerns is the presence of a large number of demobilized ex-combatants in and around the city. Officials explained that since CONADER (the Congolese agency in charge of demobilization) closed its demobilization sites earlier in July, these ex-combatants have no one providing them food or otherwise caring for them. Consequently, this group has been growing increasingly agitated and is regarded as an easy target for manipulation. MONUC officials also said the regional military command has a large stockpile of collected weapons in Kananga that are reportedly not well-guarded, again offering a temptation to any actors who may wish to take up arms after the elections.

¶7. (C) General Kasereka Sindani, the commander of the FARDC's 4th Military Region in Kananga, said the ex-combatants and arms stockpile were no reason for concern. Kasereka said the FARDC is "supervising" the ex-combatants and providing them with some support until they can finish the demobilization process. (Comment: It is unlikely the FARDC can provide such assistance, as it can barely meet the needs of its own troops. End comment.) Kasereka admitted there was a growing restlessness among the ex-combatants because they have not been paid. Kasereka said he worried this group may engage in

acts of banditry and illegal taxation, and perhaps some isolated targeted assassinations of traders or local businessmen for economic gains. Kasereka hastened to add, however, that these ex-combatants would not likely take up arms themselves to try to reverse election results, noting that not many of them were really the "fighting types." The general also provided reassurances that the weapons cache was adequately protected at the FARDC base in Kananga, and said it would be impossible for any outside forces to seize those arms. (Note: PolOff did not have the opportunity to inspect the weapons depot to verify Kasereka's claim. End note.)

POLICE RESPONSE AND TRAINING

¶ 18. (C) In Mbuji Mayi, the main stronghold of the UDPS, officials said they were worried about the conduct and training of police forces charged with providing security at polling stations. Kouyate said the police have not been well-trained, are not paid, and lack sufficient materiel such as riot gear and radios. In addition, the ranks of the police have been largely infiltrated by the UDPS, creating a force that is sympathetic to the UDPS cause. If the security situation deteriorates in Mbuji Mayi, many police officers may not be inclined to intervene. Conversely, Kouyate said because of the lack of training, the police often respond disproportionately to security situations and are easily provoked by demonstrators. The FARDC 5th Regional Military Commander General Obedi Rwibasirsa agreed with this assessment, saying he believed police forces posed the largest security threat in Mbuji Mayi. Political party and civil society representatives expressed their fears that the police will be provoked by the UDPS into reacting violently during demonstrations, further adding to civil unrest.

¶ 19. (C) On July 27, sources in Mbuji Mayi reported that tension was rising between the police and the UDPS. At the city's UDPS headquarters, police were reportedly barricading the offices and not permitting party supporters to enter the compound. Officials with the provincial governor's office said they were aware of the confrontation and were issuing orders to police commanders to bring the incident under control.

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HATE SPEECH IN LODJA FANNING FLAMES

¶ 10. (C) In the northern region of Eastern Kasai, the city of Lodja is a political flashpoint with the potential to erupt. Political campaigning in Lodja has been particularly unsavory, with several candidates (or their representatives) engaging in ethnically-based hate speech against their opponents. The High Media Authority (HAM), charged with overseeing the conduct and content of political campaign messages, earlier this month sanctioned and suspended three local radio stations -- which were affiliated with legislative candidates -- for broadcasting hate messages, which is prohibited by the DRC's electoral law. The political atmosphere in Lodja has become increasingly tense, due largely to ethnic factors. As political observers in the Kasais explained, voters in Lodja are distrustful of politicians not born in the city itself, and many have said they will only accept those candidates who are "true" Lodjans. The reaction to some candidates running in Lodja for the National Assembly -- including current Minister of Defense Adolphe Onusumba and Eastern Kasai Vice Governor Brigitte Oyumba (neither of whom are from Lodja proper) -- has been hostile. The situation in Lodja is so volatile, in fact, that MONUC military observers there have been physically assaulted and humanitarian organizations have suspended activities in the region.

WEAPONS STOCKPILES A TEMPTATION

¶11. (C) Adding to concerns about Lodja in the pre- and post-electoral period is the presence of another stockpile of weapons from demobilized soldiers. MONUC political officer David Foncho said the FARDC has a lightly-guarded arms cache in Lodja, and the military has been unable to transport the weapons to Mbuji Mayi because the roads are "too dangerous" to travel. Foncho added that MONUC, too, has been unsuccessful in trying to secure a special flight to Lodja to help transfer the arms. General Obedi confirmed the stockpile was being guarded by just 12 FARDC soldiers, but added that he has appealed to FARDC commanders in Kinshasa for an additional company of troops to provide security in Lodja. Obedi said because of the ethnic tensions prevalent in Lodja, there are "great temptations" for some to try and seize those weapons after the elections. MONUC officials in Mbuji Mayi were equally worried about the possibility for violence in Lodja, particularly if the FARDC weapons stockpile was not adequately secured.

NO WORRIES ABOUT THE FARDC

¶12. (C) By contrast, no officials in either of the Kasais expressed concerns about the FARDC itself. MONUC and regional political officials all said that for the most part, the FARDC in Eastern and Western Kasai did not pose a security threat for the elections. Generals Kasereka and Obedi both promised that their troops would be kept in their barracks during the elections, and would only be used if called upon by their respective governors to provide security. Kasereka said his forces were well aware they could not take part in elections and had been warned to maintain their neutrality, particularly after elections.

COMMENT: KASAIS LESS OF A SECURITY CONCERN

¶13. (C) The fact that the UDPS is no longer the force it once was goes a long way toward calming people's fears and in diminishing security threats. Certainly UDPS militants will provoke incidents in Kananga and Mbuji Mayi (which often become exaggerated for propaganda purposes) in an attempt to intimidate voters. Some pockets of potential instability do exist and security officials are well aware them. The conduct and training of police forces, though, particularly in Mbuji Mayi, remains worrisome. End comment.
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